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OMB No. 0704-0188

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mice of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188).

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)

2. REPORT DATE

3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED

1 Dec 86

Final: DECEMBER 1986

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

SOVIET ASSESSMENTS OF THE THEATER BALANCE OF FORCES: THE
CASE OF THE KURSK OPERATION

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

C: MDA 903-85-C-0347

6. AUTHOR(S) E. Rumer

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Cambridge, MA 02139

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION
REPORT NUMBER

NONE

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Office of the Director of Net Assessment
Rm 3A930, The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

10. SPONSORING/MONITORING
AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

93-0632

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

A. Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT

Examines Soviet assessment of the theater balance of forces.

DTIC
ELECTE
SEP 23 1993
S B D

14. SUBJECT TERMS

Soviet Assessment Theater Balance of Forces

15. NUMBER OF PAGES
30

16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF REPORT

UNCLASSIFIED

18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF THIS PAGE

UNCLASSIFIED

19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF ABSTRACT

UNCLASSIFIED

20. LIMITATION OF
ABSTRACT
SAR

SOVIET ASSESSMENTS OF THE
THEATER BALANCE OF FORCES:
The Case of the Kursk Operation

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Research Report No. 86-11

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and
Center for International Studies
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

December 1986

93-0632

OSD #88-152

93-22126
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083

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 1

Accession For	
NTIS GRA&I	<input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification	
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Availability Codes	
Dist	Avail and/or Special
A-1	

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SOVIET ASSESSMENTS OF THE THEATER BALANCE OF FORCES
The Case of the Kursk Operation

1. INTRODUCTION

It was mentioned in the introduction to the first report in this series -- Soviet Assessments of the Theater Balance of Forces: The Case of the Belorussian Operation [Report 86-10] -- that the assessment of one's own military capabilities vis-a-vis those of potential adversaries constitutes one of the major inputs in the development of military programs. This study of Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation continues our investigation into the broad question of the Soviet approach to the assessment of the balance of forces in theatre. As in The Case of the Belorussian Operation, the result of this study is not envisioned as a "Soviet-style" static assessment of the balance. Rather, we are trying to understand what factors Soviet General Staff specialists are more likely to emphasize for doctrinal, strategic, historical and geographic reasons in their assessment of the balance. Thus, we are interested in the substantive basis of Soviet theatre assessment and relative importance of its components.

The study of Soviet analyses of the Belorussian operation arrives to three tentative conclusions:

- o the "revolution in military affairs" had relatively little impact on Soviet military thinking about the strategic conduct of theater offensive operations and, hence, on Soviet assessments of the balance of forces in the theatre
- o Soviet analysts attach particular importance to local superiority and concentration of forces in the sector of the main strike;
- o If faced with the trade-off between careful preparation for the operation and good prospects for achieving surprise, Soviet analysts favor the latter.

1.2 Sources and Method

This case study is intended to test the validity of these tentative conclusions by testing them against a different set of data. It also continues the search for other key factors that may set the context for Soviet balance assessments.

The basic source of information remains the same -- Soviet analyses of strategic operations of the Great Patriotic War published in Voyenno-istoricheskii zhurnal. Where the Belorussian operation was a strategic offensive operation, the Kursk operation conducted in the Summer of 1943 is an example of a pre-planned defensive operation which was followed by a counter-offensive. Thus, the Kursk operation allows us to check the findings of the first case study for the same period of time and using the same source of data, but under different strategic conditions. Thus a new variable -- strategic mission -- will be entered into our analysis and it will be possible to address the question concerning the role it plays in Soviet theatre balance assessment.

The methodology used here remains the same as in the study of the Belorussian operation: a time-series content analysis of Soviet military-historical writings. The articles on the Kursk operation published in Voyenno-istoricheskii zhurnal were divided into three periods in accordance with what are commonly accepted as the major

turning points in the evolution of Soviet military doctrine:

- o The "revolution in military affairs" -- 1959 - 1968
- o The transition phase -- 1969 - 1974
- o The conventional phase -- 1974 - present

2. THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET ANALYSES OF THE KURSK OPERATION

Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation have undergone a significant and noticeable transformation during the last quarter of the century. The most distinctive feature of the Kursk operation in the eyes of Soviet military analysts was that its first part constituted a strategic-scale defensive operation which was followed by a counter-offensive.

2.1 Analyses of the Kursk Operation during the "Revolution in Military Affairs -- 1959 - 1968

Marshal K. Rokossovskiy's 1959 article was devoted to the events of the Kursk operation as they occurred in the sector of the Central Front of which he was the commander. The subsequent counter-offensive provided Rokossovskiy a more than ample rationale for a temporary transition to defense.¹ Rokossovskiy attached great importance to creating heavily concentrated multi-layered defenses.² He attributed the failure of the Central Front to achieve significant results in the course of counter-offensive to the losses suffered by the Soviet Army during the defensive phase of the operation.³

Rokossovskiy's analysis of the Kursk battle may be interpreted as a veiled criticism of the general insistence of the Stavka to hold every inch of territory and never retreat. In Rokossovskiy's view it is better to retreat than risk a breakthrough of the enemy forces into the operational rear of the Soviet Army.⁴ Such comments by the former commander of the Central Front combined with his view of the losses in the course of the Kursk defensive operation as being the reason for the lack of progress in counter-offensive could lead one to conclude that as a result of the Stavka's refusal to authorize retreat and use of reserves

to prevent it, the troops suffered exceedingly heavy losses, reserves were depleted and the Soviet Army's chances to achieve significant results in the course of counter-offensive were jeopardized.

Perhaps, the most comprehensive treatment of the Kursk battle to appear in Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal during the period of 1959-1968 was authored by Marshal M. Zakharov and occasioned by the battle's 20th anniversary in June-July 1963.⁵ According to Zakharov, the strategic importance of the Kursk operation was in that in the course of it the Soviet Army had finally reversed the tide of the war and gained permanent control of strategic initiative. In his assessment of the situation in the theatre Zakharov noted that by the Summer of 1943 the Soviet Union was in a much better position than Germany. Due to the improved performance of the Soviet defense industry in a number of categories such as production of tanks, aircraft and small weapons important changes had been introduced in the organization of the Soviet Army which enhanced its combat capability.⁶

However, these improvements apparently were not enough for the conduct of a successful offensive in the Summer of 1943. A combination of heavy losses suffered by the Soviet Army in the course of the Winter Campaign of 1942-43 and a difficult situation in the operational rear of the army which had fallen behind as a result of poor road conditions worsened by Spring thaw made it necessary in the view of the Stavka to make a temporary transition to defense along the entire strategic front, regroup and create powerful strategic reserves so as to launch a successful offensive in the Summer.⁷

As reported by Zakharov, the transition to defense was envisaged by

the Stavka as a purely temporary measure aimed at improving the ability of the Soviet Army to launch the Summer offensive. Therefore, it is precisely with this goal in mind that in the course of preparations for the defensive operation an unusual situation was created at the Kursk salient. In fact, Marshal Zakharov emphasized the uniqueness of the Kursk defensive operation precisely for reasons of defender's superiority in many categories and argued that it is not worthy of the title "classic" given to it by some analysts.⁸

The statistics cited by Marshal Zakharov in his article indicate that by the start of the German offensive in the key sectors of the strategic front the defender -- the Soviet Army -- enjoyed a 1.4:1 superiority in manpower; 2:1 in artillery; 1.3:1 in tanks and self-propelled artillery over the attacker.⁹ Thus, the Soviet Army had a very important advantage in the category where, according to conventional wisdom, the attacker is required to be superior -- numerical strength. In addition to that it enjoyed advantages traditionally enjoyed by the defender -- layers of fortified positions in which Soviet troops literally had dug themselves in.¹⁰

The Stavka's preparations for the Kursk operation included one other component -- creation of very powerful strategic reserves. Concentrated in the rear of the Kursk salient and subsequently combined into the Stepnoy Front, they, according to Zakharov, constituted the most powerful strategic reserves created in the course of the entire Great Patriotic War.¹¹ This was another characteristic feature of the Kursk defensive operation -- two strategic echelons. The Stepnoy Front constituted the second strategic echelons in the sector where the threat was expected to

be the greatest.¹²

Deployment of the second strategic echelon in the sector of the front where the enemy's main strike had been expected was coupled with a much greater than in the first period of the war operational density of the troops.¹³ Thus, in the Kursk operation the combination of these two factors resulted in two-dimensional concentration of forces -- in depth and along the front. Although Marshal Zakharov had pointed out in the conclusion to the article that it would have been erroneous to consider the Kursk operation as a "classic defensive operation," there is no doubt that his analysis was intended to credit the high degree of troop concentration as a major factor in the successful outcome of the battle and the final reversal of the course of the entire war.¹⁴

While the Kursk defensive operation has been firmly established in Soviet military-historical literature as the turning point of the entire war, if its importance were judged by the number of corresponding articles in Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal it would be far outranked by offensive operations of the third period of the war such as Belorussia, Vislo-Oder, and East-Prussia. The majority of analyses of the Kursk defensive operation were, apparently, occasioned by its anniversaries-- 20th, 30th, 40th -- when the principal journal of military history simply must have opened its pages to it. This relative neglect for the Kursk operation may be indicative of a more general lack of interest during most of this period in defensive operations.

The coverage of the Kursk defensive operation in Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal leaves its readers with a distinct impression that a temporary transition to defense on the operational-strategic level

allowed the Soviet Army to regroup, create strong reserves for the purpose of the subsequent counter-offensive and weaken the enemy's forces with the help of advantages traditionally enjoyed by the defender. On the strategic level the Kursk battle was the turning point of the entire war where the enemy's last chance to win the war was denied and the Soviet Army finally entered the period of strategic offensive. Thus, both operationally and strategically the temporary transition to defense at Kursk was justified by its contribution to the offensive that followed it. This is the conclusion that Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal readers must have reached on the basis of articles on the Kursk battle published there.

The second part of Marshal Zakharov's article on the Kursk operation dealt with the counter-offensive that followed the defensive battle. Unremarkable for either its quality or novelty, Zakharov's analysis attributes the successful transition to counter-offensive to the overall positive trends in the performance of Soviet defense industry which was able to supply the front with more and better (than in the Moscow counter-offensive in December 1941 and Volga in November 1942) weapons.¹⁵

Another factor that, according to Zakharov, had contributed to successful transition to counter-offensive, was that preparations for the Kursk operation were conducted during a pause in the course of which neither side had attempted to launch an offensive.¹⁶ Thus, presumably, sufficient time had been allowed for redeployment of forces and strengthening the key sectors. As was mentioned by Zakharov in the first part of the article, that was the purpose of reserves. However, as a result of the temporary transition of defense the reserves were deployed

for the defensive mode of operations so as to be able to provide reinforcement in the threatened sectors where the enemy forces were the strongest. The limited success of the counter-offensive was attributed by Zakharov precisely to inefficient use of reserves and unfortunate choice of the direction of the main strike by the Stavka which ordered the frontal attack against the Dnyol group of the German Army which had just been stopped in its offensive. That was the strongest sector of the enemy's front and, hence, one of the least opportune for the purpose of the Soviet attack.¹⁷

Thus, if Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal readers were taught that offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War owed their success to such factors as skillful choice of the direction of the main strike, surprise and superiority over the enemy in the sector of the breakthrough, they were likely to draw conclusions from Zakharov's article that were fully consistent with their previous understanding of the rules of successful offensive operations:

1. The direction of the main strike of the operation conducted by three Fronts -- Western, Bryansk and Central -- was chosen poorly, so that these fronts conducted a frontal attack of the enemy's strongest group of forces which despite just having failed in its own offensive, had been reinforced for that it and remained strong¹⁸

2. As a result of the poor choice of direction of the main strike neither the superiority over the enemy in that sector, nor surprise was achieved. and only a limited success could be achieved during the counter-offensive.

Zakharov's own analysis could only reinforce such thinking. He attributed German successful retreat from the Kursk salient to their ability to redeploy forces to key sectors of the front, thereby preventing the Soviet Army from achieving local superiority. It also had the effect of shortening the sector of the front along which the German

defense had to be conducted, increasing the density of troop deployment.¹⁹

As was mentioned earlier, Zakharov's was the most comprehensive treatment of the Kursk operation to appear in the years that became known in Soviet literature as the "revolution in military affairs." Other authors' analyses have focused on more specific aspects of the operation and served a complementary role in its coverage.

A 1963 article by N. Shekhovtsov focused on the counter-offensive of the Soviet Army following the Kursk battle. Shekhovtsov's analysis followed essentially the same course as Zakharov's article. He attributed the Soviet Army's failure to achieve significant results in the course of the counter-offensive to inefficient use of reserves in the Kursk battle which left the army without any tank and mechanized troops for the development of the operation in-depth,^{*20} its inability to regroup and achieve superiority in the key sector of the front and skillful retreat of the German Army in the course of which it managed to shorten its sector of defense and achieve high density of defense.²¹ In addition, the Soviet counter-offensive suffered from poor organization and performance of the army's rear; ammunition stocks had been depleted by the end of August and lacking an adequate transportation network

*According to Shekhovtsov, in early September when tank and mechanized troops were needed for the development of the offensive in-depth all tank armies and many mechanized corps had been recalled to the reserve of the Stavka for replenishment after having suffered heavy losses in the course of the defensive operation. Thus, the improvements introduced in the organization of the Soviet Army as a result of better performance of the Soviet industry -- creation of tank corps and armies whose mission was to serve as an armored fist in breakthrough operations -- added little to its ability to conduct offensive operations.

Soviet armies' rear fell behind by some 100-200 km and was unable to make deliveries to the troops.²²

Thus, Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation and attempts to explain the outcome of its two phases -- defensive and offensive -- singled out the same factors as analyses of the Belorussian operation. Correct selection of the sector of the main strike, surprise, concentration of forces and achievement of superiority over the enemy in the sector of the main strike accounted for the outcome of the battle. Denial to the German Army of the element of surprise and knowledge of the direction of the forthcoming attack, deployment of the second strategic echelon along with a very high concentration of troops resulted in a very high two-dimensional concentration of forces (along the front and in depth) which prevented the German Army from achieving a breakthrough. Incorrect selection of the sector of the main strike which made it impossible for the Soviet Army to achieve superiority in that sector as well as the absence of the element of surprise contributed to the Germans' well-executed retreat from the Kursk salient. That retreat was helped by their skillful maneuvering which made it possible to achieve very dense defenses and prevent a Soviet breakthrough. By contrast, in the case of the Belorussian operation its successful outcome was explained by Soviet military analysts as a result of masterful selection of the direction of the main strike resulting in surprise, local superiority in forces and their high concentration. Writings on the Kursk operation put the availability and skillful use of strategic reserves (which is of little, if any importance when the next war is expected to be short and nuclear) among the most important factors that determine the outcome of a

operation.

And just as in the case of Soviet analyses of the Belorussian operation published during the "revolution in military affairs" the authors failed to make any mention of the radical change in Soviet military doctrine, its impact on strategy and implications for the lessons that should be drawn from the experience of the Great Patriotic War.

2.2 Analyses of the Kursk Operation during the "Transition Period"-- 1969 - 1974

Analyses of the Kursk operation during the so-called "transition period" when Soviet military doctrine was evolving from its formulation of the years of the "revolution in military affairs" to the more conventional posture were more in accordance with official doctrine than during the latter period. In general it must be noted that the Kursk operation received little attention from Soviet military analysts during the transition period.

The July 1973 issue of Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal contained the mandatory 30th anniversary article on the Kursk operation written by G. Koltunov. The article repeated many of the points made earlier by other authors concerning the success of defense at the Kursk salient. Among them was the improved performance of the Soviet defense industry,²³ the Soviet Army's numerical superiority over the enemy which, combined with skillful deployment of troops produced very high densities and correlations of forces in the key sectors of the front favoring the Soviet Army.²⁴ The fact that transition to defense by the Soviet Army was carried out intentionally was stressed by Koltunov several times in his article.²⁵ As in other articles, it was justified by the ultimate

goal of subsequent counter-offensive.

Several articles published in Voyenno-istoricheskii zhurnal in the early-70's used the Kursk operation in discussions of such issues of military art as the use of strategic reserves and conduct of defensive operations.²⁶ As was mentioned earlier, in the course of preparation for the Kursk operation the Soviet High Command had created the largest reserves in the course of the entire war. According to Soviet authors, these reserves played the key role in the Kursk operation and helped increase the operational density of the troops in the "direction of the main strike." The ability of the Soviet High Command to amass such large reserves was perceived by these writers as a function of the improved performance of the Soviet defense industry.²⁷ Given the emphasis placed by Soviet military literature on the importance of application of lessons of the past to contemporary problems, the very fact that Soviet military analysts were turning to the issue of creation and use of strategic reserves could be interpreted as a sign of changing military doctrine.*²⁸

The Kursk operation was also mentioned in the context of the question of defensive operations. Two articles by Colonel V. Manamzin in 1970 and

*In the environment of the "revolution in military affairs" strategic reserves were of little or no utility because nuclear escalation was presumed to be immediate and any such reserves would constitute a highly attractive target for the enemy's missiles. The signs of change in the official doctrine, however, were hard to ignore. Writing in 1970 in an article dealing with the issue of strategic reserves Major General Zemskov stated that in "contemporary conditions" armed struggle could not be conducted without large strategic reserves and that it would be impossible to achieve the "final goals" in one strike. Zemskov saw the mission of the Supreme Command in ensuring timely preparation and proper use of strategic reserves. This issue, according to him, was highly pertinent to the current moment and should have been studied on the basis of the experience of the Great Patriotic War.

1974 discussed the war-time experience of defensive operations. As in the past, the purpose of defensive operations of the second and third periods of the war was seen solely in terms of its utility for the subsequent counter-offensive.²⁹ Improvements in the ability of the Soviet Army to conduct defensive operations was, as in the past, tied to better performance of the defense industry³⁰ and success of such operations was, apparently, measured in reverse proportion to the depth of the defender's retreat.³¹ This in turn, depended on those factors already mentioned by other authors: density of troop deployment, depth of defense or number of layers of defensive installations, and the degree of saturation of the defense sector with such armaments as tanks and self-propelled artillery. The ability to concentrate forces in the key sectors was, just as in analyses of offensive operations, considered to be the most important requirement for success.³²

Thus, Soviet discussions of the Kursk operation during the years of transition from the "revolution in military affairs" to a more conventional doctrine reflected little change from the former period. Articles published in Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal indicated that Soviet military thought and analysis of war-time operations such as the Kursk battle proceeded much along the same lines as at the previous stage of doctrine development. Factors such as the ability to concentrate forces in the key sector and achieve high density of troop deployment were deemed crucial for the conduct of successful defense. It should be noted, however, that based on the assumptions concerning the role of military-historical writings in the first part of this study, publications of the "transition phase" conformed more to our expectations

than those published during the "revolution."

2.3 Discussions of the Kursk Operation during the "Conventional" Phase-- 1974 - present

Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation have generally conformed with our expectations based on doctrinal developments and findings of the study of Soviet discussions of the Belorussian operation. However, their evolution in the contemporary period suggests that Soviet military establishment is faced with a range of fundamentally new issues with far-reaching strategic and possibly doctrinal implications.

As was mentioned earlier, temporary transition to defense in the Spring of 1943 was explained by Soviet military analysts as a measure exclusively intended to facilitate the offensive which followed. The haste with which these analysts asserted the intentional nature of transition suggests an implicit apology as if the defensive mode of operations was not worthy of the victorious Soviet Army. Therefore, the reader was left with the impression that defensive operations are undesirable and should be avoided.

There is strong evidence that suggests that in the late-70's the views of the top Soviet military leadership on the role of defense as a mode of operations began to change. A series of articles published in Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal indicates that the issue has recently attracted the attention of some prominent military officers and is of considerable interest for them.

Writing in 1979, Yu. Maksimov who since has advanced from the position of the commander of the Turkestan Military District to the job of the commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces and Deputy Minister of

Defense stated that while defense alone cannot win a war it is necessary and constitutes one of the objective phenomena of armed struggle.³³

In Maksimov's view defense cannot be looked upon only as a means for subsequent transition to counter-offensive. The goals of defense must be considered in the context of the existing strategic, operational and tactical situation. Transition to counter-offensive should be seen as the goal of defense only on the strategic level, whereas at the level of a Front or an Army defense may serve the purpose of proper reallocation of resources and transition to offensive in other sectors of the strategic front.³⁴

Maksimov's article was unusual not only for the views on the defense-offense relationship it contained but also for the type of defense that was discussed in it. Despite the changes that had taken place in Soviet military doctrine by 1979, the author's view of contemporary defensive operations was tailored to the environment dominated by armaments possessing great range, speed and destructive power such as nuclear weapons. The concept of "concentration of forces" was interpreted by Maksimov as "concentration of efforts*" in defense which can be achieved by using nuclear weapons, greater density of fire, barriers and maneuvering reserves and second echelon forces to the threatened sectors of the front; the ability to maneuver was considered even more important than in the past.³⁵ However, physical concentration of forces was no longer deemed desirable as it had been in the past because of the enormous destructive power of nuclear and new conventional weapons.

*This interpretation of the principle of concentration of forces was developed during the "revolution in military affairs."

Defense in the future would have to be based around battalion-, company-, and platoon-level fortifications spread out in order to minimize losses. The availability of nuclear weapons and greater share of tanks in defense would make it possible [for the defender] to keep a significant part of his forces in the second echelon and use them for counter-strikes. Nuclear strikes and counter-strikes, counter-attacks supported by conventional firepower were portrayed as the principal means for achieving success in defense.³⁶

Maksimov also noted that improved mobility of the enemy's troops would enable him to launch an attack very quickly. Therefore the defender would have little warning time to prepare. The factor of time in these circumstances is even more important and the task of preparation, planning and timely transition to defense -- complicated.³⁷

This discussion of the changes in defensive and offensive operations and initiation of hostilities was, apparently, intended by Maksimov to back up the following conclusion: he noted that during the great Patriotic War Soviet staffs had developed three types of preparation for operations. In two out of these three types of preparation lower-level commanders and their staffs commenced planning of operations following the completion of upper-level staff planning. In the third case the work was conducted by lower-level commanders and staffs simultaneously with that of their superiors.³⁸ In Maksimov's view, this last -- parallel-- method would be the most suited to in rapidly changing offense/defense environment or under the threat of a sudden strike by the enemy and would be most widely used in the future.³⁹

General Maksimov's article has far-reaching implications. The meaning

of his statement concerning legitimacy of defense could be viewed as an attempt to refute the view that the offensive constitutes the only desirable form of military operations at all levels -- strategic, operational and tactical. While he did not deny that only offensive operations could bring victory in war (strategic victory), on the operational and tactical levels the choice of the mode of operations should be determined by the concrete situation. The reference to the necessity of defense as an "objective phenomenon of the armed struggle" is quite explicit. If defense is an "objective phenomenon," the Soviet military establishment and the entire Soviet Army must be prepared to conduct operations in both offensive and defensive mode.

Maksimov's description of the conditions in which defensive operations would take place is reminiscent of Sokolovskiy's Voyennaya Strategiya and open to two interpretations. According to one interpretation, the Soviet Army may find under NATO's nuclear attack, possibly even a sudden* attack and may or may not resort to nuclear weapons, but not preemptively. Alternatively, it may have to defend against NATO's attack by "new conventional weapons" which again may constitute a sudden strike. As in the first case defense may be conducted with or without nuclear weapons, but in any event pre-emption is not implied in Maksimov's description. In both instances, however, the new conventional armaments are virtually equated with nuclear weapons in terms of their military utility, destructive capacity and impact on the course of operations.

*The term "sudden strike" is a translation of the Russian term "vnezapnyy udar" which in this writer's view does not imply strategic surprise but rather an operational surprise and is therefore different from such concepts of a surprise attack as "bolt out of the blue."

Within the context of Soviet military-historical literature the publication of Maksimov's article was highly unusual. The very fact that questions concerning such delicate matters as the relationship between offense and defense and the legitimacy of defense were raised in the principal military-historical publication of the Ministry of Defense (which Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal is) by a senior military officer of General Maksimov's standing indicates that these issues were of practical importance and that an authoritative opinion was needed either to refute or backup certain arguments that had arisen before the Soviet military leadership.

There is little doubt that the publication of General Maksimov's article marked the beginning of a discussion of the role and place of defense in Soviet military theory and art. The first response came from the chief of the Voroshilov General Staff Academy Army General Kozlov.

General Kozlov agreed with the views expressed in Maksimov's article. The introduction of principally new means of armed struggle, he wrote, resulted in an increase in the scale and decisiveness of military operations and made it mandatory (emphasis mine - E.B.R.) to use different forms of armed struggle including strategic defense.⁴⁰ The indisputability of this point of view was backed up by a quote from Lenin who had written that wars could not begin and end with offensive operations only; troops must be able to conduct both offensive and defensive operations.⁴¹

Kozlov's assessment of the impact of new conventional weapons on military doctrine and art was essentially the same as Maksimov's but it was expressed in much stronger terms. General Maksimov had referred to

defense as an "objective phenomenon of armed struggle" i.e. an unavoidable burden at the tactical and operational level. By contrast, General Kozlov referred specifically to strategic defense, unambiguously declared it mandatory without any implicit apologies and backed up his statement with a quote from Lenin. There is little doubt that such statements coming from the chief of the General Staff Academy with the rank of an Army General in the wake of a presumably controversial article containing previously unpublicized views constituted their strong endorsement by at least some part of Soviet military leadership.

Acceptance of these views became part of military-historical analyses in the early eighties. One of the major implicit assumptions underlying the writings of both Maksimov and Kozlov was that the Soviet Army would find itself under attack by the enemy's conventional and nuclear weapons and that pre-emption of this attack would not take place either due to failure or by intent. Similarly, the probability of extended defensive operations was implied in other writers' analyses. One article published in Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal in 1981 dealt with the issue of strategic operations. The Kursk Battle was used as an example of well-organized strategic defensive operation. Its experience was considered to be very valuable since in the future the Soviet Army would be likely to encounter adversaries with large combat-ready armies and it would be faced with the task of defeating their invasion and preparing and launching a counter-offensive.⁴² Thus, here the author assumed that at the outset of hostilities in the future the Soviet Union would find itself on the defensive.

Some writings could be interpreted as expression of doubts concerning

the ability of the Soviet Army to launch and conduct a successful offensive. For example, in an article on the development of Soviet military art published in 1983 Colonel General Gayvoronskiy observed a trend toward greater importance of gaining and controlling the strategic initiative as a function of improving combat capabilities of troops. He noted that in the conditions of parity this task is even more important.⁴³

Emphasis on the problem of gaining and controlling the strategic initiative can be explained as a sign of Soviet worries concerning their ability to do so which is fully consistent with other writings on strategic defense, transition to counter-offensive and implicit concerns about NATO capability to thwart Soviet offensive. In his discussion of the trend toward greater spatial scale of military operations Gayvoronskiy specifically referred to the improved, more precise conventional (and nuclear) weapons as the cause of greater intensity of military operations in the future.⁴⁴

Other authors have devoted their attention to the problem of transition to counter-offensive and preparations for offensive operations while in the defensive mode. An article by Major General I. Krupchenko published on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Kursk battle in July 1983 was devoted to the use of tank and mechanized troops in that operation. Krupchenko concluded that in the contemporary period the issue of organization and creation of tank formations for the offensive in the course of defense was of greatest interest.⁴⁵

Other issues related to strategic defensive operations discussed in Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal in recent years included: the use of

artillery in defense;⁴⁶ transition from the period of strategic defense to the strategic offensive;⁴⁷ the state of the Soviet economy and the rear at the time of transition from strategic defense to strategic offensive;⁴⁸ maneuver in a front-level defensive operation.⁴⁹

Such unprecedented interest in defensive operations reflected in military-historical publications of the last 6-7 years indicates that the new attitude toward defense as a form of military operations (with far-reaching doctrinal and strategic implications) has gained considerable credibility among these Soviet military establishment and that questions emanating from it occupy an important place on their research agenda.

3.0 Conclusion

Having traced the evolution of Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation through three stages in the development of Soviet military doctrine, what conclusions can we make from it? Perhaps, the most important overall conclusion is that analyses of the Kursk operation have been consistent with analyses of the Belorussian operation and the Summer 1944 campaign examined in the first part of this study.

Similarly to discussions of factors that determined the outcome of the Belorussian operation, successful defense at the Kursk salient was attributed to the ability of Soviet High Command to understand the enemy's plan and deny him the element of surprise which was deemed so important; to overall superiority over the Germans as well as to skillful deployment of troops which resulted in high concentration of forces in key sectors; and to construction of well-prepared multi-layered defenses. The depth of defense was, apparently, another factor of decisive importance; deployment of troops in two strategic echelons increased the depth of the Soviet defense but also made it possible to allocate resources to those sectors where they were most needed. Thus, high two-dimensional concentration of forces -- along the front and in-depth-- was another major factor that determined the outcome of the Kursk battle.

The evolution of Soviet analyses of the Kursk operation has also proven consistent with changes observed in the discussions of the Belorussian operation. As in the latter case, the "revolution in military affairs" did not find a very responsive audience among Soviet military analysts. Major strategic and operational changes resulting from the doctrinal shift brought about by nuclear weapons were largely ignored by them; implications and lessons drawn from war-time experience

reflected little or no impact left by the new doctrine.

Again, as in the first case-study which dealt with the Belorussian operation, analyses of the "transition" phase were more consistent with what we expected to observe: a growing interest in the conduct of conventional operations.

The most interesting development occurred in the most recent -- "conventional" -- phase of development of the doctrine. Articles written by several highly authoritative military analysts in the last seven years have reflected some truly revolutionary developments in Soviet military thinking.

Having followed Soviet analyses of both Belorussian and Kursk operation we can now say with assurance that Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal has displayed a much greater interest in the former as an offensive operation and the latter's offensive aspects than in its defensive aspects and issues related to the conduct of defensive operations in general. Until recently, many articles dealing with the Kursk operation focused heavily on such issues as transition to counter-offensive and saw the justification of transition to defense in the Spring of 1943 only in its contribution to the planned offensive. This, perhaps, can be best explained as a result of the practical tendency in Soviet military history as a discipline which is intended to be the source of practical advice to the Armed Forces in their search for answers to current problems.

However, important changes observed in the analyses of the Kursk operation in the last 6-7 years indicate that defensive operations and related issues have now occupied a prominent place among the problems

facing Soviet military community. In fact, articles written by such authors as Generals Maksimov, Kozlov, Krupchenko, Gayvoronskiy reflect the ongoing re-assessment of the entire relationship between offense and defense. Without challenging the importance of the offensive, these authors, apparently, argue that as a result of improvements in conventional capabilities of the future enemy the Soviet Army may find itself on the defensive from the very first moment of the war. Since the enemy's conventional capabilities can disrupt the Soviet attack and deliver strikes deep into the Soviet rear they can be considered offensive and as a result the attacker will have to carry out both roles -- of the defender and the attacker. Thus, the clear distinction between offense and defense is lost and the Soviet Army will have to conduct both types of operations simultaneously.

These changes in Soviet thinking provide support to the conclusion about the importance of troop concentration and surprise as factors in Soviet analyses of the Belorussian operation and as components of the theatre balance. Discussions of the impact of the new weapons on preparations for and conduct of operations have stressed the need to disperse forces and the ability of these weapons to inflict heavy losses on large troop concentrations.

Besides giving us support for the conclusions made earlier, the intensity and openness of discussion concerning the impact of new conventional weapons on the preparation and conduct of operations indicate that these weapons or their perceived capabilities constitute an important element of the balance of forces in the theatre. The apparent concern expressed by Soviet military analysts over these weapons can

serve as an indicator of Soviet approach to balance assessment and suggest avenues for improvements in NATO's deterrent capabilities.

ENDNOTES

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2. Rokossovskiy 1959; 24-25
3. Rokossovskiy 1959; 32
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23. Koltunov 1973; 27
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27. Kazakov 1972; 50
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